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Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

As I Saw Things

WHEN I was quite a youth, I reached a very definite conclusion concerning Christianity, and of religion in general. So far as I can recall my early years, I never had belief in any religion. As I have said elsewhere, belonging to Jewish parents whose religious belief was a very, very thin shield, I was protected against the virus of Christianity. And with Christians all round me I had a shield against whatever Jewish religion met me in my daily life. I never developed a pose of sadness at having to give up what to me was just a part of tales of fairies and goblins. I had no fear of devils and no love for God (the reader may, if he chooses, reverse the positions of God and Satan). I was never able to discover any vital difference between these two famous deities. They were each struggling for power, and like many humans came a cropper, the latest being Jesus. Later it was with ease that I passed from nothing particular, to a complete Atheist.

But I was always interested with the rise and fall of gods and creeds, particularly with gods. I suppose I was almost unconsciously getting interested in the part religion played in the history of mankind. But there was no question of belief in any kind of religion; my interest really lay in the way that religions rose and fell, were praised and cursed by others. My interest in religion was that of a young student's interest in a museum of curiosities. I never "hated" Christianity, I just disliked it. "Hatred" is a great thing, a lofty passion (read Shakespeare for proof) and it belongs to great character. Vermin are not hated, they are just disliked. One may have contempt for gods and creeds, but there is, hanging over them, a half pitiful, half contemptuousness of poor out things.

That was my chief prevailing feeling to religion as a whole. I could see nothing to admire in men and women loudly proclaiming they deserved damnation, and joyfully thanking God that someone suffered for their alleged sins. That kind of thing, whether it be true or merely symbolical, involves a degradation of character. I daresay that if I had sprung from other parents, I should have come to a different conclusion, but I was lucky—I might even have become a preacher! It is good for all young men and women to begin life with a not too heavy intellectual load. With a light load, one can travel easily, and he wastes no time in getting rid of curious things that his forbears have saved up for his use, but which are sadly out of date. The religion that youngsters have to carry clogs their powers at the outset. The sound human rule would be to turn out children who become better than their parents and are able to soar above the follies and superstitions of the generation from which they spring. Parents cannot do too much

for their children, but they can very easily teach them too much.

There was one feature of Christianity that seemed to stand out clearly as one got better acquainted with it. I felt that the Christian religion was mean in essence, and in spite of the talk of love one another, it disguised the meanest features that faced the earth. It seemed a splendid cover for meanness nicely covered with expressions of lofty ideals and noble motives. It talked much of humility and meekness and purity and excelled in arrogance, egotism, and lack of consideration for those outside the range of sectarian interests, and evidenced obsession with a kind of inverted sexuality that left a trail of uncleanness in its path. I found Christians talking much of giving their souls to God, but as God never talked, they were unable to know what God thought of the specimens submitted to him. I found them proficient in the mouthing of moral sentiments and finding this a very satisfactory substitute for healthy conduct. With a fervid propagandist zeal for improving other people, the Christian seemed to lose sight of the fact that some little attention should be paid to home affairs. His superiority was, indeed, a negative product derived from the contemplation of the badness of other people. It was this that gave—and gives—to the average Christian such a glow of moral worth when he is dilating on the vice of wickedness at home and the sinners abroad. In a thousand and one ways I found the Christian throwing up a moral smoke screen between himself and his real motives. By himself he could be neither daringly good nor decently bad. Whether it was selling opium on an international scale, annexing land from natives in all parts of the world, covering the seas with battleships or the land with armies, some highly religious or moral motive had to be found for the occasion. He never clearly saw himself from the beginning to the end of life, and there is little wonder that when his real friends showed him his real picture, he rejected the portrait as a caricature.

There was one further thing that demanded consideration. Christianity had always seemed to possess a weird fascination for "sinners"—whether of the historic heroic type, or poor snivelling specimens in the shape of converted burglars and wife beaters. But I knew that miracles are no more possible in the world of morals than in the world of atoms. Character is not changed in the twinkling of an eye, despite the torrent of sanctified lying on this head that has been poured out by Christian preachers. The converted man is the same man as the unconverted, even though his qualities may now find some other method of gratification. Character is a question of development, and development is development, not miraculous transformation.

Now these things I have been describing were, and are, too widespread to be accidental. Some causal connexion between them and Christianity there must be and it is not very difficult to discern what and where this is. Let me

take, for example, one of the most detestable of the intellectual vices, intolerance. This is, in science, the unforgivable sin, in literature it is deprecated, even in politics any man will resent with indignation the charge of being intolerant. But if a man is intolerant by nature, what can so easily transform this vice into a virtue as religion? He does not hide it, he boasts of it and counts it unto himself for righteousness. He will boast that he will not look at the other side, or read the other side, or listen to the other side. It is true he will not call his conduct intolerant, neither will his friends. He will call it a strong religious conviction, and they will refer to his profound religious belief. Nothing occurs to rouse him to a consciousness of the cultivation of one of the most evil qualities of human mentality; on the contrary, it rises to the rank of a virtue, his religion has moralised it. He feels the better for being intolerant, and is actually honoured for cultivating a quality of which every decent man or woman ought to be ashamed. I do not mean, of course, that intolerance is confined to religion, but I do mean that religion is the one thing that enables a man to cultivate it without sinking in the estimation of those around him.

Now that gives one of the outstanding influences of Christianity in civilised life. It does not remove many of the ugly features of social life, it moralises them. It has, for instance, neither abolished, diminished, nor humanized war, but it has been the great inventor of moral justifications for it. It has taught men to be more truthful, but in preaching and writing it has developed the use of falsehood in its service. So much is this the case that in all the innumerable slanders that have gone forth from Christian pulpits concerning those who differed from Christianity, I cannot recall a single case in which the slanderer has lost grace in the eyes of the Church. It has never encouraged a man to look straight at himself, and to face the motives that were actuating his conduct. Christianity did not invent the meanness of human nature, but I know of nothing that has done more to favour their expression. Of Christianity one may say as one may say of other things, men may have been good with it, but they would have been better without it.

These notes are really an answer to a question. This was put to me by one of my religious readers. He wanted to know why I hated Christianity so much. I have replied that I do not *hate* it at all. Real hatred should only exist, I might say can only exist, between equals. There is nothing essentially mean about hatred. It is a strong masculine passion and should be spent only on strong masculine things. For mean things one can only feel contempt. But in relation to Christianity even that statement needs some little qualification. Christianity as a bundle of primitive beliefs and savage ceremonies is full of interest to anyone who takes a lively and intelligent interest in human evolution. In that respect one can examine it with just the same kind of feeling that one has towards the primitive forms of life that one finds in a museum of paleontology. It is when we find these beliefs and practices seriously put forward for the acceptance of a civilised community, and find them "rationalised" into something they have never meant and never can honestly be made to mean, that the evil is done. It is then that a belief acts as a poison in the social and intellectual life of a nation. And one does not hate a parasite. One is simply disgusted with its presence and is anxious for its removal. CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE DAYS OF DANIEL DE FOE

THE creator of "Robinson Crusoe," De Foe (1661-1731), was in many ways the father of the English novel. In the words of John Forster, the friend and biographer of Dickens, De Foe was born at a time when the people "drunk with the orgies of the Restoration, rejoiced in nothing so much as in pumps and courtesans . . . Sheldon governed the Church and Clarendon the State; the bishop having no better charity than to bring Presbyterian ministers into contempt, and the chancellor no better wisdom than to reduce them to beggary."

With the passing of the Act of Uniformity in 1662, 3,000 ministers were deprived of their benefices and all prospect of toleration or reasonable adjustment of differences vanished. In 1663, the Conventicle Act followed which made transportation the punishment of all who for three times attended any place of worship except that of the State Church. Thus, Dissent was driven underground and the persecuted sectaries conducted their services in secret, while gaining sympathy and support from those who might otherwise have remained indifferent.

Bitter persecution proving abortive, an Act of Indulgence was passed in the days of the Dutch War, and in a reopened meeting house in Bishopsgate, James Foe, a prosperous butcher, worshipped with his son, Daniel, then a bright-eyed boy of eleven. But even this concession under Charles II was coupled with an indulgence to Romanists and was really a cover for the Crown's endeavour to restore Popery in Britain.

Young Daniel received a fair course of instruction at an academy in Newington Green where Charles Morton, who subsequently became a vice-president of Harvard College, in New England, officiated as headmaster. All subjects were taught in plain English; the pupils became masters of their native tongue and it is said that "more excelled in that particular than in any other school at that time."

The Act of Indulgence was withdrawn in 1674, and further penal laws were passed against Nonconformists from 1676 to 1678. Then a passionate anti-Papal feeling was aroused by the sensational stories of a widespread Popish Plot which led to the execution of prominent Catholics, many of whom were apparently innocent of all complicity in crime.

When the ignoble reign of Charles II neared its close, a fiercer persecution of Dissenters was in full blast. When James II succeeded his brother he was almost deified. "Of the new monarch's greetings," observes Forster, "the most grovelling were those of the churchmen and lawyers. The Bishop of Chester preached the divinity and infallibility of kings. The Temple benchers and barristers went to Court with the assurance that high prerogative in its fullest extent was the subject's best security for liberty and property, and in every pulpit the thanksgivings resounded."

Clerical and legal abasement appear almost incredible. Young De Foe was so scandalised that he was persuaded to join the ill-fated rising of Monmouth in which he took part. Fortunately, however, he escaped the horrible fate of those insurgents who, in an evil hour, fell into the fangs of Jeffreys and his subordinates, for he crossed the Channel and did not return until it was safe to do so.

When the wanderer reappeared, he found that the right of the Crown to dispense with the laws of the land had been affirmed by eleven of the twelve Judges. This dispensing power was being employed to suspend the persecution of Protestant Dissenters who only too eagerly embraced this ostensible clemency of the new king, without realising that its joyful acceptance was tantamount to a recognition of royal despotism. De Foe was among the very few Dissidents who viewed these proceedings with grave concern.

Henry of Navarre thought the possession of Paris well worth a mass. According to the then Archbishop of Rheims, James II was an honest ruler who sacrificed three kingdoms for a mass.

In his essay on De Foe, Forster shrewdly remarks that James' unvaried, sole endeavour was to establish the Roman Catholic religion in England. When the Church, which had declared resistance un-Christian and proffered him unconditional licence, refused him a single benefice, fat or lean, and kept his hungry Popish doctors outside the butteries of her Oxford colleges—the Dissenters became his hope. If he could array himself against the Church, there was an entrance yet for Rome. This was his passion. He had literally no other; and to balance or counteract it, he had neither the breadth of understanding nor the warmth of heart."

De Foe stood steadfastly by the Prince of Orange, when he became king as William III, after the flight of James II. He also prepared an "Essay on Projects" which recommended reforms in Banking methods; stressed the importance of improved public roads as national benefits and as a source of revenue; the more considerate treatment of honest insolvents; more efficient legislation against business knavery with a reliable system of insurance against trading risks; a Savings Bank for the poor and, to crown all, compassionate treatment of the mentally afflicted. These far-reaching suggestions clearly prove that De Foe was well in advance of his time.

In his "Essay," De Foe contended that Acts of Parliament were more mockeries when they allowed those who administered them to excuse their own class, while penalising poor offenders. The Parson," he complains, "preaches a thundering sermon against drunkenness, and the Justice sets my poor neighbour in the stocks; and I am like to be much the better for either, when I know that this same Parson and this same Justice were both drunk together but the night before."

De Foe deemed Occasional Conformity on the part of Dissenters a derogation of dignity and a sacrifice of independence. Leading Dissenters never forgave De Foe for his plain speaking, and ignored his valuable services. Indeed: Presbyterian ministers took his moral treatises into their pulpits with them, cribbed from them, preached upon their texts, largely quoted them, but were careful to suppress his name."

The disloyalty and ingratitude of the self-seeking politicians towards the king who had saved their country from despotism, aroused De Foe's fighting spirit, and he composed in verse his "True Born Englishman" in which he satirised William's detractors, some of whom plumed themselves on their purity of race. Truly enough this publication "proved the undeniable fact that, so far from being of pure birth and blood, Englishmen are the most mixed race on earth, and owe to that very circumstance their distinction over feebler races. Whilst others, for the lack of such replenishment, have dwindled or perished, the English have been reinvigorated and sustained by it."

The opening lines of the satire are memorable:—

Wherever God erects a house of prayer,
The Devil always builds a chapel there;
And 'twill be found upon examination,
The latter always has the largest congregation.

After the depopulation occasioned by the Civil War, Charles II is shown to have adequately functioned in replenishing the community and increasing the peerage:—

And carefully repeopling us again,
Throughout his lazy, long, lascivious reign;
French cooks, Scotch pedlars and Italian whores,
Were all made lords or lord's progenitors.
Beggars and bastards by his new creation
Still multiplied the peerage of the nation,
Who will be all, ere one short age runs o'er,
As true born lords as those we had before;
Then with true English pride, they contemn
Schomberg and Portland, new-made noblemen!

This satire was an astounding success. In addition to the nine editions authorised by De Foe, twelve pirated editions were

printed and it is said that 80,000 copies were sold in the streets alone. For it laughed to scorn all those who welcomed Charles II's illegitimate offspring, while sneering at the distinguished Dutchmen raised to the peerage by King William. De Foe's satire won Court appreciation. He visited the Palace, and during the remaining period of William's reign he was consulted concerning various aspects of public policy by his sovereign.

"Robinson Crusoe," the work by which De Foe is best known, has been translated into every European and many other languages. Yet, like many other famous writings, it was repeatedly rejected by publishers. But, when it appeared, it was so favourably received by the public that De Foe's subsequent writings were eagerly accepted by the trade. His style was clear and copious, and to his imaginative works our leading modern novelists have been indebted, while most of his books are as readable as they were when written two centuries ago.

T. F. PALMER.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PEACE

MANY radio listeners will doubtless have noted a recent broadcast by Mr. Herbert Read, in which that acute critic praised Dr. Edward Glover's "War, Sadism and Pacifism" (Allen and Unwin, 9s. 6d.) as possibly the most important contribution to the problem of peace yet to make its appearance in print. That seems a claim very difficult to substantiate, especially when one remembers the books on a similar topic written by Aldous Huxley, Laurence Houseman, Sir Arthur Keith and countless other writers of some standing. However, I think that many Freethinkers may be found to agree.

Dr. Glover, I should mention, is a psycho-analyst. Accordingly, he considers that economic and political reforms, necessary though some of them may be to the future development of international affairs, will be useless unless they are linked with an investigation of the unconscious trends towards sadism and masochism which contribute to what he calls war-readiness. And when one thinks about the problem, it is certainly rather surprising that the majority of people in all countries are perfectly ready, after a little propaganda, to believe that the citizens of another clime are their deadly enemies, who must be exterminated at all costs. It is in his examination of this aspect of the problem that Dr. Glover is, I feel, most valuable, but in his investigation of war neuroses he likewise has many important things to say.

I know that many people will hold that the psychological side of warfare is a comparatively unimportant side, and will consider that Dr. Glover is stressing one part of the problem unduly. Here, however, is his answer to those who consider that the economic aspect of war is all-important:—

"If the Communist or the economist or, for the matter of that, any advocate of the primacy of economic motives would take the trouble to tiptoe quietly into the nearest nursery and would sit down in a corner, he would learn more about human nature in two hours than in a ten years' course at any School of Economics."

As a direct consequence of this conclusion, Dr. Glover asserts that the hope for the future lies mainly in the children of the various nations. If children can be brought up adequately, then there is some hope for the future. But he stresses that his plan is a long-term plan, and that no short-term solution can be found. Meanwhile, it is necessary to endure even atom-bombardment if no other way can be found. Certainly the antics of UNO do not lead to any great hope for the future. The psychologists should certainly be able to do better than that much over-praised institution.

H. L. S.

ACID DROPS

It is a pity that some of the leading members of the Government are not a little more careful in their uncalled for praise of Christianity. It is also regrettable that the said members do not bethink themselves that they were not appointed to "Praise the Lord" and act as Christian propagandists. Now there are plenty of non-Christians, and there is a fair sprinkling of men who have no religion at all, and these might be asking questions, make it quite clear that we are in the year 1947, not in the sixteenth century. Honesty of opinion should be regarded. At present we may describe the inmates of Parliament as divided; those who belong to the religion of the seventeenth century, those who think that there might be a god of some kind wandering about, and Atheists under different labels who, with a few exceptions, find no use for gods at any price. It is a very mixed dish, but the last section could do some very useful freethinking propaganda if they cared to face the storm.

Among those who are fond of dragging religion into uncalled for places is Sir Stafford Cripps. Sir Stafford, not for the first time, informs the people the main factor in the betterment of the country is the deep spiritual value of our Christian faith. But our Christian faith before the upheaval of war, and the spiritual faith did not prevent the war. Hitler also had a deep religious faith, and it was worked to the slaughter of the people of this country—and of others. Deep spiritual power was as real with Hitler as it was with Churchill. Accepting the term, a feeling of power and strength, is common to all people, including the skill with which the thieves in this country are at present doing a roaring trade. It is a very sad thing when our chief rulers insist on saying things which on analysis really meant nothing at all. In plain fact we are all affected by words, but we should be on our guard on over doses of religious slush. They embody the greatest of dangers.

The "Buxton Herald" reports the Rev. J. W. Dyer as saying that "Historically the theory of the Church as a divine instrument has failed. . . . We stand to-day in a world which is not only denying our claims, but it is denying our influence." Well, that is well said, and it is quite true—with comments. Ever since the Christian Church was established it has been fighting what was essentially a losing battle. For a time it gained the lead by crushing the arts, and literature, and even progressive life. The impression of the Church on life was so bad that even Christian writers were compelled to refer to the Christian period as "the dark ages," and the revival of the ancient learning is known as the "Renaissance" which being translated means "rebirth." Ever since that awakening the Churches have been fighting against the consequences of that awakening. The last stage is the social one. The scientific and others are established, and all that the Churches can do against them is to "nibble." But religious movements are still powerful enough to obstruct social developments, and it is that war which is now in full swing. The Rev. Dyer is correct: "The old 'religious' authorities are of no leading significance and make no appeal." It is a curious position. If people hang on to the old teaching destruction at a rapid speed is inevitable. If they try to produce new religious ideas they merely permit a little longer life. That is the real situation. Thank you, Rev. J. W. Dyer.

Refused, no doubt, a hearing in a religious journal, an anonymous clergyman writes to our contemporary, "John Bull," and points out that as far as a legal marriage is concerned, any bishop objecting to marry "divorced" persons is sinning against the law of the land. A Registrar, whether secular or in "holy orders" is bound to perform the marriage ceremony. Moreover the words "till death us do part" are not part of the legal ceremony at all but have been inserted by the Church "to give an added solemnity and for no other purpose." We are always pleased to find that there are some clergymen who refuse to be "yes-men," and who can think sometimes for themselves.

So it is good to see a clergyman telling the truth regarding a legal marriage. We have been saying all our life that the religious marriage meant nothing at all. Legally it died with the institution of the secular marriage. The law is that a

marriage may take place in buildings licensed by the State, and the official—the only official—must be ordered by the State. The Churches come under the same rule, as does the clergyman. The Church must be licensed by the State, and is in the eyes of the law merely a licensed building. The Parson may act, but not as a parson. He must hold a licence from the State. But the religion has no legal standing whatever. The clergy know this quite as well as we do. But they keep silent, and it so proves that you may tell a lie without speaking.

The Scout Movement was originally started with an expressed desire of bringing boys of all nations together. But honesty appears to be impossible where religion is concerned. So those who liked the idea of "Scouts" helped. But very soon behind that there was a development in the direction of making the "Scouts" advocates of religion. We are not surprised to learn that the 800 boy scouts who have been meeting in France recently were literally obliged to attend the religious services provided, and they even went to the "Feast of the Assumption" under the auspices of the Greek Orthodox Church. For those boys who are English, "there was a daily Eucharist," but we often wonder what would happen if a Scoutmaster was a Freethinker and held daily "services" to show the credulity, superstition, and downright lies inculcated by the Christian Church. Wouldn't there be a holy row!

The "Church Times" always gets hot and bothered whenever people look upon the Church of England as a "Protestant" sect. "We are compelled," it pompously says, "to protest against insidious attempts to treat the Church of England as if she was just one of many Protestant sects." But in reality is not that exactly what the Church of England is? Or, perhaps, we ought to say, does not the Church of England actually contain within itself a large number of Protestant sects? Why, even in the pages of the "Church Times" are wearisome controversies on all aspects of Christian teaching carried on by members of the Church of England, all violently disagreeing among themselves as to what is or is not "Church of England" teaching. The "Church Times" itself stands for a very narrow sect, and even then its members cannot agree.

Here is an example worth noting. From the "Universe" we pick up the following. "Our Lady (one of the travelling Saints) has made her appearance at 'Slovaia.'" It is artfully done. The situation makes enough noise, and if a number of people can be induced to believe they say "Our Lady," she will appear in her full war dress, and the heavenly lady will become a real and regular visitor. If the miracle does not take on, "Our Lady" retires to be produced on some future occasion. It is an easy game, and apparently profitable. But if a fortune teller or a miracle worker tried the same game—minus the Church—he would soon find himself, or herself, in prison. The world is full of strange things and people.

There has been an enormous amount of ideas of where Jesus came from and what he came for. Now the Rev. Snaith, in the "Methodist Recorder," says that "Jesus came to earth to save men from sin." That does not tell us much. But if he came from some other planet than ours, he was about as complete a failure as anyone could have imagined. On the other hand, if he did help some people all that was brought by Jesus was quite as good without him as with him. Honesty was and is as common with those who do not believe in Jesus as with people who were in touch with him. There were good men before Jesus, and his followers have never been better than those who had nothing to do with him. The fact is that genuine Christianity never was, and never did consider that the teaching of decency, and its practice—could save men in terms of their good behaviour, and no one anywhere really expects Christians to be better than others.

Someone has stolen a valuable painting out of an Italian Church. Now here was an opportunity for action—heavenly action. When the thief touched the picture his hands should have withered, or he should have been struck dead, or something of that kind.

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SUGAR PLUMS

We believe that many of our readers will be interested to know that the date which marks the current appearance of this journal, coincides with the date on which the editor and his wife reach their "Golden Wedding." More important, it registers fifty years of complete happiness. Whether we shall reach the "Diamond Wedding," we cannot say. But if health and unity remains we shall try.

The following appeared in the "Manchester Guardian":—
MISGUIDED USE OF "ATHEISM"

Dr. Julian Huxley, Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation, replying to an attack by the Texas American Legion on his theological views, said to-day: "I consider myself a religious man."

Dr. Huxley was described as "Europe's leading atheist" by the Texas Legionaires, who asked for his removal from his U.N.E.S.C.O. position.

"The Texans would seem to be misguided in the use of the word 'atheism,'" Dr. Huxley said. "They seem to be thinking of it as a term of abuse synonymous with 'anti-religious.' I consider myself a religious man, though I do not subscribe to a theistic interpretation of the religious spirit.

"Religion can perfectly well be non-theistic—take, for example, Buddhism. No one, surely, would deny the right of Buddhists to be called religious. I will cheerfully welcome in Paris any Texan members of the American Legion who would like to discuss the finer points of this question with me."—Associated Press.

This is a rather curious document, all things considered. We do not know on what ground the "Texas American Legion" describes Dr. Huxley as "England's Leading Atheist." He has openly never proclaimed himself as such, although we remember that some time back when we suggested that it was time that some prominent scientific men, such as himself, dropped the mask and openly declared for Atheism, he said that he took that much for granted. There are, of course, many prominent men and women who might well bear the title of Atheist. The curious thing is that he should, in spite of his Atheism, consider himself a "religious" man. Why? Words are intended to carry and express ideas; but an expression that means one thing now and another thing to-morrow leads, ultimately, to cheer confusion. Dr. Huxley insists that he is both, a non-believer in God with a firm belief that he is a "religious man." We do not agree,

and we turn to a very good dictionary. We find this: "Religion"—Reverence for the gods." That and "Fear of God" come along line after line. The definition is clear.

Atheism is a very good word. It means exactly one thing and one only. It is not merely a good word, it is a useful word, and an honest word. We assert that if one stopped a man in the street and asked him what was the meaning of Atheism he would say, "No belief in God." On the other hand, you would find the same agreement, "religious" meant a belief in God. We may say that Dr. Huxley's call to Buddha does not help him. Buddha had no Gods.

It is very chivalrous of Dr. Huxley to offer to go to Paris and discuss the matter with the "American Legion." But why go to Paris? There is at present quite a multitude of men and women in this country who are without belief in God, who insist in labelling themselves by other names that inevitably create confusion where clarity of ideas and language is greatly needed. If a man does not believe in God, he *must* be an Atheist, call himself what he will. There is no deception about such a word as Atheism, or Atheist. It means "without God." The word is simple and its meaning clear. Perhaps it is because of these qualities that a great many people who dropped all sorts of gods does not like. You simply cannot get a double meaning of "Atheism." It is a word that is almost as old as "God." It is part of the eternal play of truth and falsity.

The spell of real summer weather has meant a busy time for N.S.S. speakers. Manchester Branch, in addition to Messrs. C. McCall and A. Taylor, report two promising platform recruits in Messrs. J. Kay and R. Billing. Messrs. Brighton and Clayton are putting in some good hard work in their respective circuits, and Mr T. M. Mosley finds time to hold meetings in Nottingham and other places. In London, Mr L. Ebury just ignores the weather and carries on his meetings winter and summer, whilst in Kingston, Mr. J. W. Barker is on platform duty every Sunday evening. May the fine weather and the good work continue.

Mr. Arvin Schmid, of the "Truthseeker", reports that the "Atheist", official organ of the A.A.A.A. (American Association for the Advancement of Atheism) has sold over 2,000 copies of its first issue in New York alone. It is hoped to publish every month in the future.

THE ARAB EMPIRE AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO OUR MODERN CIVILISATION

I

"If it had not been for the high civilisation of the great Arab Empire we should not now be enjoying—*inter alia*—aseptic surgery, tea, newspapers, motor cars, cinemas, radio, the scientific outlook generally, and many of our most beautiful flowers."

"If the Moslems had succeeded in occupying France and Northern Europe a thousand years ago our civilisation to-day would probably be (completely secular and consequently) about five hundred years more advanced."

Can the two above theses be substantiated?

Before proceeding to discuss what the Saracens achieved it will perhaps be useful to give a very brief résumé of the beginnings of this mighty movement, about which our school books are pointedly silent, and for obvious reasons. The average man has never even heard of the Arab Empire!

Up to the time of Mahommed practically nothing was known of this secluded Semitic people, except that Christian intrusion upon their domains was fiercely and effectively resented.

Shortly before Mahommed was born a prophet named Waraka was seen wandering up and down the country preaching the imminent advent of a Mahdi or Messiah. In fulfilment of this prophecy, Mahommed was duly born at Mecca about A.D. 570,

his arrival being signalled to all the world by a mighty earthquake, a shooting star in the East and an eclipse of the sun. Satan and his host were cast (temporarily) into the sea, and the sacred flame that had never ceased to burn on the altar of Zarathustra for a thousand years was extinguished. The Holy Scriptures tell us that with the Babe's first breath he cried: "Allah is Great! There is no God but Allah, and I am His Prophet!"

One would think that a birth preceded by miraculous prophecy and accompanied by all these supernatural demonstrations would have been followed by a correspondingly wonderful childhood and adolescence surrounded by an adoring populace, his every move and word written down by countless scribes, but, as a sad matter of fact, nothing more was heard of or invented about the miraculous Child till about 40 years later, when he began to be known and hated as an inspired monotheistic preacher.

In 622 A.D. he was forced to fly from Mecca with his disciples to Medina, a nearby town, and it is from the year of this flight or Hegira that Moslems date their year.

The Saracens, as these men were called, do not appear to have had at this time any important Holy Scriptures, but they had a very considerable oral literature, like all primitive peoples, and innumerable legends in which devils, demons, angels, saints, prophets, etc., played important roles, just as they used to do in England when the writer was a boy, and during the ten years between the Hegira and his death, at about 62 years of age, Mahommed finished his transcription of the Holy Moslem Bible or Koran, much of which was revealed to him by Allah in person or, when Allah was busy, by an assistant Archangel, very much as was the case with our own Bible.

Mahommed was the only man in history who founded an empire as well as a religion; who was at once poet, general and legislator.

In 632 A.D., i.e., in the Moslem year 10, Mahommed died and was succeeded by his friend and adviser, Abu Bekr, the first Kalif or successor. *And now there follows the most amazing story of conquest in the whole history of our race.*

The Romans were easily driven out of Palestine (circa 634) by the Faith-inspired armies of Allah. Persia and Mesopotamia were conquered with amazing rapidity three years later, and the Moors proceeded to penetrate into India beyond the Ind, and on the North East to the borders of China.

Envoys of the Prophet to the Emperor of China established a school of learning in Canton about A.D. 628 and their mosque is, I believe, still standing, 13 centuries old. So I was told some years ago in Hong Kong. These Arabs saw for the first time tea, paper, and woodblock printing, and found all the arts and sciences flourishing, for, at this time, when the minds of Christian peoples were still thickly obscured with religious superstitions and dominated by a powerful Church violently opposed to all new ideas and anything remotely savouring of science, the mind of China was open, tolerant and eager to give and receive knowledge of every description. This was what a thousand years of Confucianism had done for China.

"It was from outposts such as this one that the rulers of the new Mahommedan empire collected, with an insatiable appetite, from China, India, Persia, Egypt, and even Christian Greece, knowledge which they instinctively felt they would need in the administration of their newly acquired territories." (H. G. Wells' "Outline of History.")

Six years after the death of the prophet a new capital was founded, on the Euphrates, Bussoora, a city eventually attaining a population of a quarter of a million, and acquiring a considerable reputation as a centre of learning.

Meanwhile, another army, stimulated by the faith which moves mountains, had driven the Christians (Romans) out of Palestine and Southern Syria, the Bedaween natives welcoming the change of rulers and enlisting in their thousands in the Saracen armies.

Damascus fell, and Jerusalem surrendered without resistance. The Jews and Christians resident in and about Jerusalem had their lands confiscated but were permitted to retain their religious beliefs, though it was the general rule in those days that a conquered people adopted the god of their conquerors. After all, a religion is merely what one is taught to believe at school, neither better nor worse than what the other child was taught to believe at his school.

Many of these people eventually migrated to Europe, spreading far and wide among the comparatively uncivilised Christians the wonders they had seen and the wisdom they had acquired from their "heathen" conquerors.

M. C. BROTHERTON, COMDR., R.N.

MORALITY AND RELIGION

(Continued from page 303)

WHAT do we know of the self? At first extremely vague; the soul, as a definite article of belief, is the result of a long process of development. The initial intellectual gropings were imaginative; have the character of dream phantasy. With language imitative and script pictographical thinking was visual, and the visions real; as with the vision which speaks through the mouth of the prophet Ezekiel. The flexibility of alphabetical script gave greater subtlety in poetic metaphor, myth and analogy. The early mathematical gropings were also quaint and phantastic. The precision of measurement was added, but, the inception of astronomy and geometry was obscured in a mass of superstition; phallic, fertility and astrological cults; in each of which, the soul assumes a different mystical character. And we must not forget, particularly in Egypt, the cult of the dead. The Greeks, supreme Ikonists, increased the subtlety of projection in the poetic metaphor and mythology of the Heroic Age. Projection clouded the beginnings of physical science for, as Charles Singer said, even the concept Physis was personified and almost raised to a god. Man became the measure of all things in a humanistic analogue. The affinities of sympathy and antipathy merely expressed the character of homœopathic magic. With insufficient knowledge to explain sensation, Democritus fell back on the savage soul in his theory of ideas (Greek for vision). In developing the theory of ideas, Plato was only reiterating the savage belief that all things have souls. It was only elaboration, the basic assumptions were axiomatic. Unable to escape from belief in souls, metaphysicians try to explain the world and their fellow men by analysing their own feelings and sensations. But find only a reflection of themselves.

The impact of increasing knowledge gives rise to a host of new words. As its etymology implies, the word desire referred to an astrological influence. Inspiration came from, and aspiration ascended to, the stars. Geometrical magic gave fire, air, earth and water, in medicine, as the four humours, assumed to affect human character. The invention of consciousness by Plotinus arose from the discovery of the nerves by Galen. It was an assumed mediator between the spiritual soul and the material body. A host of such assumptions, mind, thought, reason, wisdom, were built up into a geometrical pyramid, a veritable hierarchy, analogous to the political structure. Aristotle's entelechies or causes, were followed by others, intuition, intention, will. The result of this speculative analysis was that the soul became split up into separate souls or motives, which reflected the dialectical antithesis of love and hate. In search of natural law, the motives of Stoic duty and Epicurean pleasure were given as reasons. Each go to extremes, but like the Golden Mean seek the harmony of the spheres. It is all so delightfully transcendental. Even when scientific discovery disproves a theory, the terms continue in customary usage. For instance, with astronomy demonstrating the material character of the

celestial bodies, we still aspire to heavenly bliss in the condemnation of low morals. We are lost in a maze of metaphysical assumptions, eclectic and rhetorical verbiage. The transition from magic to science involves a mass of false analogies which confuse and confound mental and moral considerations. When Leonardo da Vinci's camera obscura rendered the theory of ideas obsolete, not only did the old terms continue, but a fresh crop arose. Centuries of philosophical controversy gave us perception, sense impression, apprehension, comprehension. In the mystical intellectual confusion that can square the concepts of infinity and eternity with finite ideas of creation and destruction, beginnings and ends, the dream phantasy of visualisation appears in a new form of verbal imagery which expresses with greater definition the affinities and infinities of human hopes and fears.

H. H. PREECE.

(To be continued)

MAN AND MIND

This, my Mind, my Master is—
I need no other guide.
No Unseen God to pry or prod,
No Bible by my side.

Not in fear my footsteps fall;
No stumbling in the fog.
No Future bought nor favours sought
While cringing like a dog.

Seeking Truth—not savage myth—
In Reason lies my trust.
No pagan creed can serve my need
And in my eyes throw dust.

Not for me do bishops bleat;
Their blessings let them keep
For those without the wits to doubt—
Who only wail and weep.

Happy Man! Unfettered—free—
The Open Road I choose.
Where others shrink—I dare to Think—
And gain what others lose!

W. H. WOOD.

CORRESPONDENCE

FROM POLAND.

Sir.—As a pre-war reader of "The Freethinker" I was very glad to hear that it has been appearing all these years without any interruption. I see with joy that articles written by you are always have been—the best ornament of the periodical, and "Acid Drops" and "Sugar Plums" are sour and sweet in good measure.

The readers of "Wolnomyslciel Polski" ("Polish Freethinker") are well acquainted with both, as many of them were frequently published in our paper in the excellent translations of Miss Amelia Kurlandzka, who is a well-known translator of Bertrand Russell's works into the Polish language. Miss Kurlandzka asks me to send you her greetings.

I should like to give you some information about the Freethinkers' Movement in Poland.

Our Association, founded in 1921, was dissolved in 1936. This was brought about by the constant demands of our Roman clergy. Our four periodicals were also prohibited. We restarted our

activity last year under the name of "Stowarzyszenie Mysli Wolnej w Polsce" ("Free Thoughts Association in Poland"). We edit a monthly paper, "Glos Wolnych" ("Voice of the Free"). It brings together our old followers, the survivors of them, and our new friends. Our aim is the separation of the Church from the State.

In September, 1945, it was proclaimed by the Polish Government that the Concordat does not bind Poland any more and that the fault of this breach lies with the Vatican. The clergy do not receive any wages from the Treasury but religion is taught in the schools as if the Concordat was still in existence. The new school year may bring a change in this matter; it was announced so.

We are in contact with the "World Union of Freethinkers" and have been invited to the meeting which is to take place in Amsterdam 6th-8th September. The Union secretary asked us to send you, among other brotherly editions, our "Glos Wolnych." We have done it and hope to receive in exchange your paper.

I am editor of the "Glos Wolnych" and president of the Central Committee of "Stowarzyszenie Mysli Wolnej w Polsce." —Yours, etc.,
TEOFIL JASKIEWICZ.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).— Sunday, 12 noon, Mr. L. EBURY; (Highbury Corner) Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. L. EBURY.

West London Branch (Hyde Park).— Sunday, 6 p.m.: Messrs. F. PAGE, JAMES HART, C. E. WOOD. Thursday, 7 p.m.: Messrs. F. PAGE, JAMES HART, C. E. WOOD.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. H. DAY.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. REILLY.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).— Sunday, 3 p.m., Messrs. KAY, TAYLOR and McCALL.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Blitzed Site, Ranelagh Street, Liverpool).—Sunday, 7 p.m., a lecture.

Nottingham (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. T. M. MOSLEY.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barkers Pool).— Sunday, 7 p.m., Messrs. G. L. GREAVES and A. SAMMS.

LECTURE

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MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS

THE clergy are as tantalising in their chatter as a saucy wench can be to a love-sick young man when building up his hopes.

Such a one as this in clerical petticoats is Father John Heenan of Manor Park in describing the ignorant young doctor, without mentioning his name, who was supposed to be guilty of nodding towards a picture of the Virgin Mary hanging on the wall over Grannie's bed and asking of all things who the film fan was!

I can imagine the smiles on his flock's faces on that Sunday morning not to mention the millions of B.B.C. listeners at this bold padre's excursions in jokes best suited for the music hall, especially when, in the next breath, this quick-change artist had only to suggest a hymnal of our frailties similar to "We are but little children weak" to stem the tide of sheer joy.

Thus the church is double-faced, it can speak truth with as much ease as it can falsehood.

I can well understand these spiritual doctors who prefer not to dabble in medicine, forensic or otherwise, until they really feel the need of something more substantial than spirit for the purpose of delaying the opportunity of travelling heavenwards.

There are some very clever and cunning fellows among the clergy who seem to be more interested in political issues than religious ones, and it is most amazing the way they have invaded the front bench of humanitarian ideals and discoveries belonging to pioneers who put all they knew into the service of man rather than all the religious beliefs.

Then again, there are other clerics like the Reverend G. T. Bellhouse, who performed before the microphone one Sunday morning.

The voice of this poor man was most pathetic, it sounded as though he had just recovered from a jolly good hiding and was making the best of it, with the help of God. My dear wife hurried from her busy pantry with the threatening remark: "For goodness sake turn it off," though these are not exactly the words she uttered.

I'm happy however to mention that I was able to console her by explaining that it seemed to me to be a distressing case known as logomania, which is said to be an impaired faculty of speech often connected with some organic disease of the nervous system; and not impossibly connected with a psychological disturbance caused, I think, through trying to understand the Bible without being acquainted with the unbiased opinion of scholars like John Ruskin, who said:—

"If you read the Bible with a predetermination to pick out every text you approve of, on these terms you will find it entirely intelligible and wholly delightful; but if you read it with a real purpose of trying to understand it, and obey, and so read it all through steadily, you will find it, out and out, the crabbedest and most difficult book you ever tried."

Alas, it is tragic to recall those who have been led into the house of bondage through trying to understand this beautiful book. I do hope the Rev. G. T. Bellhouse will recover sufficiently to realise that the Bible is surely more suitable for the undertaker than understanding, but not until the best has been rescued before interment.

The proprietors and managing directors of the church find it a very lucrative and successful business in deceiving the millions. They even point their fingers to great men and women of learning and modern achievements as belonging to the church, and, if not, well, they will retort—we bury them anyway.

Religious authority from ancient times has checked, by the severest corporal punishment, persecution and imprisonment, any individual who contributed towards knowledge and learning that tended to contradict the Bible's balderdash. But the church was not so unknowledgeable as to evade the terrible responsibility

of handing over its millions of poor victims to the State to carry out the actual and barbarous punishment too horrible to describe.

Every stepping stone towards service and enlightenment from thousands of years before Christ to our own times has been hard won by blood, sweat and tears as it is to this day.

It is not too harsh nor false to say that the clergy are literally and actively loitering on the records and graves of those gallant men and women who refused to retract the knowledge they had gained. Very rare courage indeed, my masters, to wait, sometimes for years, in prison before the final curtain of horror was raised to show the howling mobs what loving humans doth God create to look upon. But enough! The claws of the church have been somewhat trimmed, but they grow again and we must be on our guard, as a perusal of history will show. It's modern counterparts are too much of the comfortable, drawing-room type. It uses scientific methods to make itself heard and seen. It still invades the school or college to claim the child and form its ideas, as a seed in virgin soil. And quietly, and without noisy abuse, it will demand the dismissal of any teacher worthy of the name from employment should they refuse to give religious lessons well known to be false.

Believe me, there is nothing the universal church, as an organised body, doesn't know nor how to deal with effectively in its political manoeuvres to frustrate those knowledgeable tendencies that would regulate the world's populations to a healthy degree.

Life is so abundant that all the atom bombs of man's invention will never stay it, nor religious wars either, so much so, that when other people's religions are challenged to be inferior to their own, it appears that the only way out of this difficulty is for all the gods to get their heads together for a lasting and peaceful conclusion, say, through a real head-on collision (!) so that humanity may proceed with a new era of civilisation in which there would be no further need for gods.

The disestablishment of the church entirely would mean £20 millions of the people's money per year being transferred for better services if it were not that the church is still successful in dodging the payment of rates and taxes on their worldly property.

One word more, whilst the Ministers of State and Members of Parliament listen like good dumb fellows while the priest utters prayers before the political shop is opened for business, without having the courage to protest, and seek safety in political office concealing their private opinions, I don't wonder in the least why the people are sinking through the burdens of taxation and the curse that religious ideas have upon the great mass of people too mentally muddled and ill informed to understand the thousand and one governmental policies after a hard day's work.

TIMOTHY THOMAS.

HOW THE CHURCHES BETRAY THEIR CHRIST. An Examination of British Christianity. By C. G. L. Du Cann. Price 9d.; postage 1d.

THE MOTHER OF GOD. By G. W. Foote. Price 3d.; postage 1d.

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